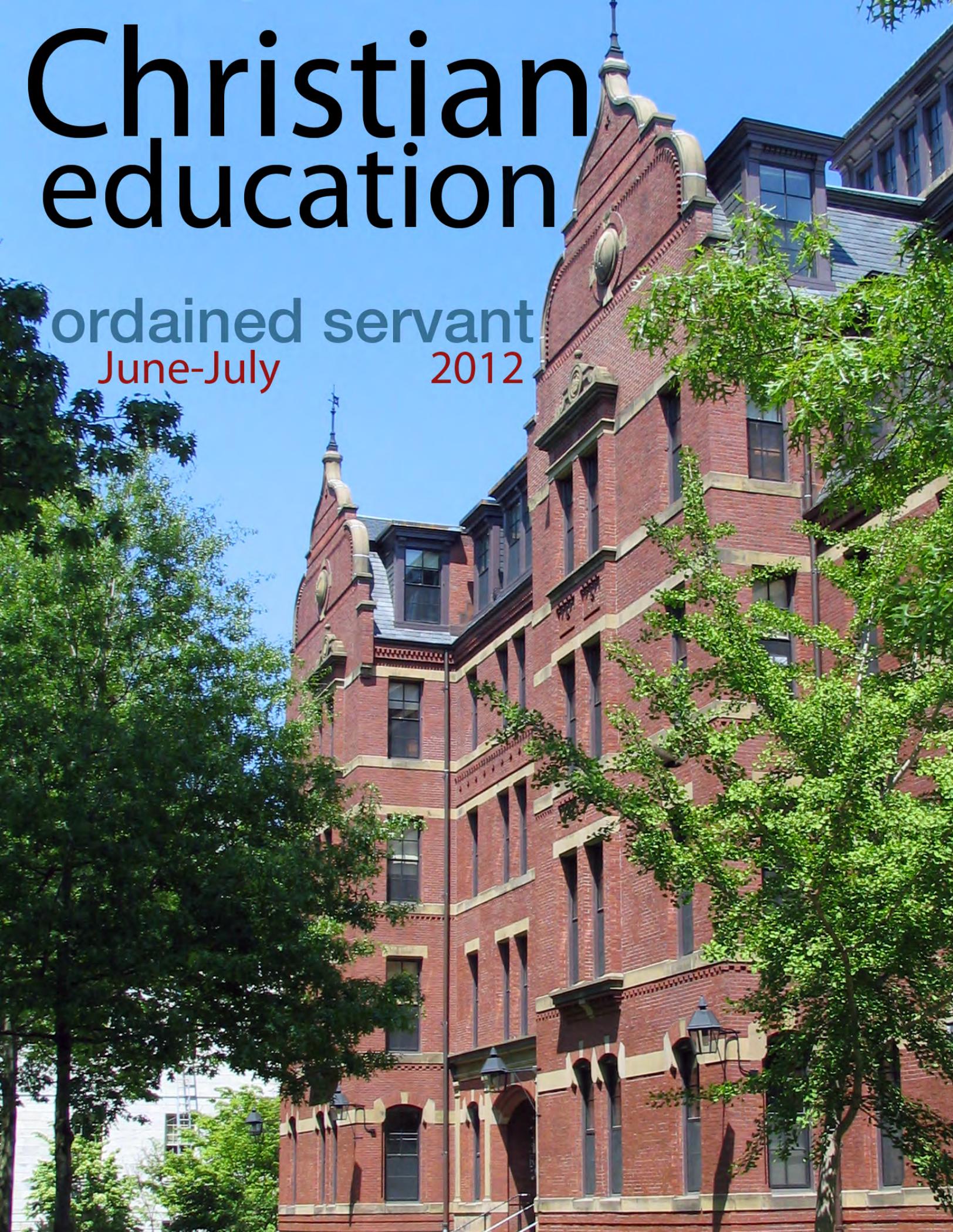


# Christian education

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# *Ordained Servant Online*

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### *From the Editor*

My original intention was to have this issue address higher education among Christians. But since there were a number of concerns expressed about David Noe's article "Is There Such a Thing as Christian Education?" in the April *OSO*, it turns out that the title of the current issue has been slightly changed. I considered the title "Education: Christian or Otherwise," given the range of the offerings in this issue.

Benjamin Miller has written a thoughtful response that fundamentally disagrees with Noe. Noe in turn has been given opportunity to reply to this response, as is the custom of this journal. My editorial "Education, Natural Law, and the Two Kingdoms" seeks to frame the discussion to help readers understand the wider context and my position on publishing the Noe article to begin with. I am grateful for the level of discussion carried on by Miller and Noe. I believe that this is just what the important larger topic of the relationship between Christ and culture needs over the coming years and even decades. While I do not want *OS* to become a debate forum, I do think that it serves us well if on occasion we engage in such exchanges.

I hope to have a number of articles over the coming years exploring the contributions of Christian institutions of higher learning. So in this issue Robert Tarullo reflects on the relationship Geneva College has had with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. This is a well researched piece. Then James Gidley critically analyses the well-known classic *Frankenstein*—probably best known through cinema. Gidley explodes three myths and demonstrates Shelley's concern with the relationship of technology to our humanity.

Finally, Darryl Hart reviews *The Anointed: Evangelical Truth in a Secular Age*, by Randall J. Stephens and Karl W. Giberson. It seems that the authors need to apply their critique of depending on experts to their own enterprise.

Copies of the print edition (2011) of *OS* should be arriving shortly.

A new set of updated indexes, covering through December 2011, should be posted shortly. Should you notice a typographical or other sort of error, please inform me. Thanks to John Muether for his skillful indexing given as a gift to *OS*.

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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*Ordained Servant* exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high quality editorials, articles, and book reviews we endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

# Servant Thoughts

## Education, Natural Law, and the Two Kingdoms

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Gregory E. Reynolds

Several readers of *OSO* have expressed strong disagreement with David Noe's article in the April issue: "Is There Such a Thing as Christian Education?" While it is never my intention to stir up controversy, I do like to stimulate discussion on important issues. Natural law and the two kingdom doctrines are, to my mind, just such issues. Why is it that these ideas raise red flags? I think it is at least partly because these ideas are being re-introduced into Reformed circles, but are new to many of us, at least here in America, because for over a century Neo-Calvinism and more recently various forms of worldview transformationism have ruled the day.

As Benjamin Miller, in his exchange with David Noe, points out, the thinking reflected in Noe's original article is outside the mainstream of OPC thinking on the subject of Christ and culture generally and education in particular. This does not, of course, mean that these doctrines are necessarily unorthodox, just not the received wisdom on these topics within our circles over the past century or so. Because of this, I can understand how Noe's article could be both upsetting and misunderstood. This is why Noe's clarification in response to Miller's critique is important.

As the editor of *OSO* my intention in publishing David Noe's article was to provide a case in point based on David VanDrunen's general, more programmatic article on natural law and his latest book, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture*.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean I necessarily agree with every point in either article or the book. It does mean that I believe that this is an area where we need to rethink some conventional wisdom. Personally, I have found natural law and the two kingdoms, in its essential formulations in the post-Reformation and VanDrunen's restatement, liberating in a number of ways. First, it has helped me to appreciate God's common grace gifts to unbelievers. Second, it has therefore motivated me to engage more modestly with them in arenas of common concern, interest, and enjoyment. Third, and consequently, it has given me more opportunity for evangelism. Fourth, it has enabled me to more fully explore and appreciate God's common grace cultural gifts. This has in no way dulled my sense of the antithesis or my zeal to spread the gospel.

Perhaps past abuses, among the American Reformed, of the idea that "all truth is God's truth," make some of us gun-shy about exploring and assessing a Reformed articulation of natural law and the two kingdoms. This is not to say that there is a uniform position on these doctrines in Reformed historical theology, nor is it to say that VanDrunen's articulation of these doctrines is entirely without some innovations. The latter would have to be the case, since we live in a very different context from past generations of theological reflection on

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<sup>1</sup> David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010), 166–72.

these doctrines. The range of Reformed thinking on Christ and culture issues in general and education in particular should alert us to the fact that lengthy comprehensive discussion and even principled disagreement is warranted.

While in general I believe there is a Christian perspective on everything, in particular I believe that each area of activity or discipline in human life, outside of special revelation and the church, has its own natural God-given laws perceived through general revelation, which are no less under God's sovereign control, just not so through special revelation and the church. Not only so, but as David VanDrunen shows in his section on education in *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*,

Each field of learning explores some aspect of the created order, and thus the very first thing taught in Scripture, that God has created all things, pertains generally to all academic inquiry. God's upholding the natural order (Genesis 8:21–22) underlies mathematics and the natural sciences, his upholding the social order (Genesis 9:1–7) underlies the social sciences, and the twin facts of human sinfulness and image-bearing (Genesis 1:26–27; 3:16–19; 9:6) underlie the humanities.

These considerations suggest the conclusion that Scripture says crucial things about *the big picture* of all the academic disciplines, while it is silent about nearly all the *narrower, technical details* of these disciplines (except theology). (I recognize that this can only be a general rule and that it will not always be clear where to draw the line between the big picture and the technical details.) Scripture teaches that God upholds the order of nature, but it does not explain trigonometry or how to play the oboe. Only examination and experimentation with the natural order itself can yield such knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

So, everything is under God's sovereign control and the Christian views everything through the lens of Scripture, recognizing God's common grace, based on the Noahic covenant, and the ways in which sinful human beings exercise their God-given talents for good or ill.

Belief in common grace, natural law, and the common kingdom does not, as I asserted above, in any way dull the antithesis, which Cornelius Van Til so robustly articulated. The antithesis is always in force for the Christian by virtue of his being in covenant with God. We are called to be loyal to King Jesus as his ambassadors in this world, which is his world, and will one day be reclaimed in its fullness in the new heaven and the new earth. Meanwhile we are pilgrim witnesses of the gospel. "We desire to make the common kingdom better when we can, but we should not try to 'transform' it into something other than the common kingdom."<sup>3</sup>

With that in mind we must beware of failing to engage fully in the study of a given discipline in terms of its own God-given, common grace, integrity. I must understand Kant before I can critique him. As a believer I am called to be faithful in every area of life. The two kingdom and natural law doctrines, as far as I understand them, do not compromise this. Nor do they compromise my commitment to the antithesis as it informs the difference between the interpretive worldviews of believers and unbelievers.

As I have alluded to above, there is a danger in Christian worldview thinking that we not appreciate the contributions that unbelievers make to common culture. We can easily fall into

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 170.

a kind of worldview separatism, which along with impoverishing us culturally, closes doors for evangelism. As VanDrunen asserts, “Understanding how to interact with and learn from unbelievers is an important part of living in this world.”<sup>4</sup>

Calvin had some sagacious things to say on the topic of our need to appreciate the gifts of unbelievers in common culture,

Hence, with good reason we are compelled to confess that its beginning is inborn in human nature. Therefore this evidence clearly testifies to a universal apprehension of reason and understanding by nature implanted in men. Yet so universal is this good that every man ought to recognize for himself in it the peculiar grace of God. The Creator of nature himself abundantly arouses this gratitude in us when he creates imbeciles. Through them he shows the endowments that the human soul would enjoy unpervaded by his light, a light so natural to all that it is certainly a free gift of his beneficence to each! Now the discovery or systematic transmission of the arts, or the inner and more excellent knowledge of them, which is characteristic of few, is not a sufficient proof of common discernment. Yet because it is bestowed indiscriminately upon pious and impious, it is rightly counted among natural gifts.

Whenever we come upon these matters in secular writers, let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God’s excellent gifts. If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God. For by holding the gifts of the Spirit in slight esteem, we contemn and reproach the Spirit himself. What then? Shall we deny that the truth shone upon the ancient jurists who established civic order and discipline with such great equity? Shall we say that the philosophers were blind in their fine observation and artful description of nature? Shall we say that those men were devoid of understanding who conceived the art of disputation and taught us to speak reasonably? Shall we say that they are insane who developed medicine, devoting their labor to our benefit? What shall we say of all the mathematical sciences? Shall we consider them the ravings of madmen? No, we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without great admiration. We marvel at them because we are compelled to recognize how preeminent they are. But shall we count anything praiseworthy or noble without recognizing at the same time that it comes from God? Let us be ashamed of such ingratitude, into which not even the pagan poets fell, for they confessed that the gods had invented philosophy, laws, and all useful arts. Those men whom Scripture [1 Corinthians 2:14] calls “natural men” were, indeed, sharp and penetrating in their investigation of inferior things. Let us, accordingly, learn by their example how many gifts the Lord left to human nature even after it was despoiled of its true good.<sup>5</sup>

When it comes to our use of “Christian” as a modifier of nouns, I believe that Christian education in its narrowest definition is precisely what the visible church is called to do: teach the whole counsel of God. But I also believe that there is value in Christian primary,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.2.14–15, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:272–74.

secondary, and higher education, although the fact that it is provided by Christians guarantees neither its academic excellence, nor its faithfulness to Scripture. But I do not believe that disciplines, apart from theology, are specifically “Christian” in any meaningful way that differentiates them from those disciplines taught in secular schools. As VanDrunen observes regarding claims of the uniqueness of “Christian scholarship”: “Most of their [Christian college professors Tim Morris and Don Petcher, authors of *Science and Grace: God’s Reign in the Natural Sciences*] applications are neither uniquely Christian nor even unique to the natural sciences.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, VanDrunen observes that George Marsden’s four illustrations of “how faith bears on scholarship focus on big picture issues or motivation, and none on the actual technical practice of the disciplines themselves.”<sup>7</sup>

A further danger in using “Christian” to modify every area of life is the tendency of assuming that our view of what makes a given area Christian is the only way for Christians to properly understand it. So in education, other than in special revelation, it is easy to disregard the many means of educating, as well as many ways of understanding a particular discipline, that Christians may hold.

This is not to say that there is no value in a Christian teacher bringing the truth of special revelation to bear on the particulars of a discipline. This will, of course, vary from subject to subject. The Bible does not address mathematics in the detail that it addresses what constitutes a human being. Thus, studying Plato will offer more opportunities for discussing biblical anthropology. This in turn, however, does not obviate the necessity of thoroughly understanding Plato.

As I said two months ago in my introduction to the articles by David VanDrunen “Natural Law in Reformed Theology: Historical Reflections and Biblical Suggestions,” and David Noe, “Is There Such a Thing as Christian Education?” I believe Noe is simply applying what VanDrunen has been teaching about natural law and the two kingdoms.

While it is always important in our ecclesiastical debates to be concerned about the unity and peace of the church as well as its doctrinal and ethical purity, debates are an important aspect of the church militant’s life and witness here on earth. Recent topics of intense discussion, such as justification, union with Christ, the nature of the covenants, and natural law and the two kingdoms, have forced us to open our Bibles, confessional standards, and theologies as we seek understanding and consensus within our confessional boundaries. Debate also forces us to consult the ancient church fathers and the Reformers. But most illuminating to me in recent years has been our renewed interest in post-Reformation theologians. The continuity between the magisterial Reformers and these post-Reformation theologians has, until recently, been vastly underestimated. This, in turn, has led to the rediscovery of a number of important doctrines, especially natural law and the two kingdoms.

It is important that we each take the time to prayerfully and humbly read what those we think we differ with have written. May our great God bless our conversation on these important topics.

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<sup>6</sup> VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 182.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

# ServantExchange

## A Response to Noe's Article "Is There Such a Thing as Christian Education?"

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by Benjamin W. Miller

I am writing in regard to the article by Dr. David Noe in the April 2012 edition of *Ordained Servant*, bearing the provocative title, "Is There Such a Thing as Christian Education?"

Dr. Noe seeks to mount an effective (and in his mind, it seems, somewhat overdue) assault on "that last noun-stronghold where the adjective 'Christian' shelters and where many thinking Christians wish to keep it protected," namely, education. The adjective "Christian," he argues early in his article, has been attached most unhelpfully to all sorts of nouns, not only without adding any real meaning to these nouns, but actually with the effect of muddling their meaning.

What, for instance (he asks), is the difference between bicycling and "Christian" bicycling? Or piano practice and "Christian" piano practice? Or volleyball and "Christian" volleyball? If we cannot discern how attaching "Christian" to such nouns makes any difference, other than to create the misimpression that (say) the motion of bump/set/spike changes because one believes in Jesus, should we not abandon the adjective? But then, why stop here? Is it not in the interests of semantic economy to unburden other nouns, such as "philosophy" and "art"? Doesn't one read the same text of *Gorgias* whether one is a Christian or not? Doth not the Christian and the pagan potter throw the same clay? Who then can meaningfully speak of "Christian" or "non-Christian" philosophy or art?

With all of this in hand, Dr. Noe finally reaches out to grasp his intended quarry: there can be (he says) nothing distinctively "Christian" about either the process or the result of the activity for which we employ the noun "education." For instance, "the fact that I am a Christian would make no observable difference in either process or result when it comes to educating students in Plato." From this it follows: "the most we can say about 'Christian education' is that it is education delivered or provided by Christians. . . . [In saying that, we are] saying nothing distinguishable either about the process or the result of that process."

I retrace Dr. Noe's steps in this way because I wish it to be clear that I have understood him. Quite clearly, in fact. And having understood him, I don't know which appalls me more: his argument, or the fact that his argument was presented in *Ordained Servant Online* without so much as a hint that it reflects anything other than the mainstream of thought in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. I, for one, wish to register my dissent from Dr. Noe's argument and his conclusion in the strongest possible terms,

and I am fully confident that I am not the only minister in the OPC who would wish to do so.

Is it in fact the case that the bread of “education” simply is what it is, and that being a disciple of Jesus Christ determines nothing more than the jam one prefers on one’s bread? That is precisely what Dr. Noe is saying: the text of Plato is the text of Plato, the teaching of Plato is the teaching of Plato, and while one may dab on here or there the condiment of Christianity, this has nothing to do with the substance of one’s learning, or the process by which it is learned.

What is completely absent from this analysis is a biblically holistic understanding of education. One could, I suppose, reduce “education” to mere data input. One could perhaps even call such data input “the acquisition of knowledge.” What one could *not* do is derive such an educational model from the anthropology presented in Scripture. Man, in biblical terms, is never simply a receptacle for data; he is called to bear the image of God in understanding, discernment, and wisdom; and the formative processes of God’s covenant with his people, especially when they are still young, are all directed at the inculcation not simply of information but of everything meant by *wisdom*. (As an aside, it is remarkable that Dr. Noe, a classicist, fails even to *mention* Christian interaction with the classical trivium in terms of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.) Data neither exists in the raw, nor is it ever learned in the raw; it is always discovered and mastered within an interpretive framework (a “worldview,” to deploy the overused term). The same may be said of the development of various skills: all are learned within an interpretive and teleological context, within the context of a worldview. Here I don’t think I can improve on the words of J. Gresham Machen, who said of the “freedom” granted by government schools for hours of religious instruction:

But what miserable makeshifts all such measures, even at the best, are! Underlying them is the notion that religion embraces only one particular part of human life. Let the public schools take care of the rest of life—such seems to be the notion—and one or two hours during the week will be sufficient to fill the gap which they leave. But as a matter of fact the religion of the Christian man embraces the whole of his life. Without Christ he was dead in trespasses and sins, but he has now been made alive by the Spirit of God; he was formerly alien from the household of God, but has now been made a member of God’s covenant people. Can this new relationship to God be regarded as concerning only one part, and apparently a small part, of his life? No, it concerns all his life; and everything that he does he should do now as a child of God.

It is this profound Christian permeation of every human activity, no matter how secular the world may regard it as being, which is brought about by the Christian school and the Christian school alone. I do not want to be guilty of exaggerations at this point. A Christian boy or girl can learn mathematics, for example, from a teacher who is not a Christian; and truth is truth however learned. But while truth is truth however learned, the bearing of truth, the meaning of truth, the purpose of truth (even in the sphere of mathematics) seem entirely different to the Christian from that which they seem to the non-Christian; and that is why a truly Christian education is possible only when Christian conviction underlies not a part, but all, of the curriculum of the

school. True learning and true piety go hand in hand, and Christianity embraces the whole of life—those are great central convictions that underlie the Christian school.<sup>1</sup>

This is not difficult to illustrate, using adjectives other than “Christian.” My background prior to the ministry was in law, and there is no doubt that the Bill of Rights is the Bill of Rights whether one studies it at UC Berkeley or Regent University. One could therefore try to make the case that the adjectives “progressive” and “conservative” are meaningless as applied to constitutional jurisprudence. That would be news to the faculty and students at either institution.

Or one might say that because Yale Divinity School and Westminster Theological Seminary use the same Greek New Testament, the adjectives “evangelical” and “non-evangelical” are vacuous in New Testament studies. Dr. Noe actually says something very like this: “Presumably a very bright non-Christian reasoning consistently, diligently and with complete access to the basic data of special revelation, can more often reach sound and valid conclusions than the most devout yet dim-witted believer on the topic of our Lord’s incarnation.” As a plank in his overall argument, I find this simply bizarre: are we really prepared to say that because some non-Christians bring a higher IQ to the Bible than some Christians, and because everyone is using the same Bible, there is no significant difference between a “Christian” and a “non-Christian” understanding of our Lord’s incarnation? I wonder: should the pastor with an average IQ offer his Sunday school class to the brilliant pagan from the local divinity school, because the biblical data of the incarnation is the same no matter who teaches it?

Or let us suppose the educational subject matter at hand is sexuality. The facts are the facts, for Christians and non-Christians alike; yet I can hardly imagine a Christian parent who wouldn’t insist on presenting those “facts” within a decidedly “Christian” context. Here as elsewhere, the “facts” are never in the raw; it makes a universe of difference whether they’re learned within the context of the fear of the Lord, or not. If that is true in sex education, it’s true in all education. There is no sphere of learning in which the child of God is not called and commanded to love the Lord his God with all of his *mind*. There is an educational process that aims at this result, and there is an educational process that undermines it. The one is Christian; the other is not.

Our fathers in the OPC have made this case even more strongly than I have done here. Cornelius Van Til, for example, had this to say on the issue of educational method:

Here, too, the temptation besets us that we should be very keen to watch the methods that are used around us. Now this too is in itself altogether commendable and necessary. It is commendable because every good soldier should know the tactics of the enemy. It is commendable too because perhaps some of the methods used by the enemy may be transformed and used by us. But *transformed* they must always be. We cannot afford to say that if only we place a different content before our pupils we need not worry about the form because the form is neutral. If a glass has contained carboic acid you do not merely pour it out in order then to give your child a drink of water. How much more impossible will it be to take a non-Christian spiritual content

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<sup>1</sup> J. Gresham Machen, "The Necessity of the Christian School," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2004), 171–72.

and pour it out of its form in order to use the latter for the pouring out of a definite Christian-theistic content? The connection between form and matter is too much like that of skin and flesh to allow for the easy removal of the one without taking something of the other. It is incumbent on us to be on our guard with respect to the educational methods of our opponents. We can never, strictly speaking, use their methods. We can use methods that appear similar to theirs, but never can we use methods that are the same as theirs.

So, then, our conclusion with respect to the educational philosophies and the educational policies that surround us is that we must be intensively and extensively negative or we can never be intensively and extensively positive in the Christian-theistic sense of the term. The fundamental principle of the antithesis upon which Christianity is built demands nothing less than that. We must more and more dare to be consistently peculiar in our educational policies. If we dare to be peculiar we will be “peculiar” in the eyes of the world, to be sure, but we will not be “peculiar” in the eyes of God. If we are not peculiar, we will be “peculiar” in the eyes of God and be twice “peculiar” in the eyes of the world. (emphasis in original)<sup>2</sup>

These are sage words, and we would do well to heed them for the sake of our children’s children.

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<sup>2</sup> Cornelius Van Til, “Antitheses in Education,” in *Foundations of Christian Education: Addresses to Christian Teachers*, ed. Dennis E. Johnson (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990), 14.

# A Rejoinder to Miller's Response to the Noe Article

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by David Noe

## Some Preliminary Comments and Qualifications

I want to begin by thanking Rev. Miller for his careful reading of my essay, and the editor for this opportunity to respond to his criticisms. In the interest of full disclosure, the reader should know that Mr. Miller and I had the opportunity to speak by telephone after he graciously sent me an advance copy of his critique. While I reply directly to his comments below, I would like to begin by clarifying, for those who may not have read as closely as Mr. Miller, what the original essay both did and did not say.

First, this was not an essay that dealt with the topic of the appropriateness of Christian schooling as such. Nowhere in the essay was it suggested that Christian schools are illegitimate, wrong-headed, etc. Although the Christian day school has never, to my knowledge, been a large part of OPC culture, I understand that for many it serves an important function and do not seek to undermine that. Rather, my intention was to question whether one of the common rationales adduced in support of what is called Christian education—that it is fundamentally different from non-Christian education—really holds up to scrutiny. In my estimation it does not, at least not without a few important qualifications.<sup>1</sup>

These qualifications, though present in the original essay, nevertheless ought to be restated here. First, education provided by Christians may in fact differ from that provided by non-Christians, but not necessarily so. And even when it does, it is not in the way perhaps commonly thought. Moreover, such a difference may not even be observable. We as Christians ought to have more devotion in our instruction, more zeal for the truth, more love for our students, more desire to see the name of Christ glorified, and so forth. If we are honest, however, we will acknowledge that such is not always the case. Consequently, as I labored to explain, the primary value of this as of any activity in which we engage as followers of Christ rests in our intentions and motivations, as Calvin explains in *Institutes* 3.17 and as Westminster Confession of Faith 16 summarizes. This is what is unique about our actions as Christians. But do we really want the “Christian-ness” of any of our activities, including our efforts to educate, judged by the consistency of their content or the effect they have on others? Our gracious Father at the last day will, the Scriptures promise, reward our works—whether they be catechizing our children, feeding the poor, preaching his Word, teaching Demosthenes or, like Calvin, writing

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<sup>1</sup> There are two excellent rationales for the Christian day school or the Christian college, like the ones where I teach. The first, is that we are dealing explicitly with the content of special revelation, topics that are likely not of as much interest to non-believers. The second is that Christian parents rightly want to shelter their children from immoral influences during more tender years. It does not seem to me that the latter applies so well to Christian colleges, but such decisions are best left to the believer's freedom.

commentaries on Seneca. But such reward comes for Christ's merit, not ours, and is not commensurate with their intrinsic value (cf. Isaiah 64, Matthew 20, and Romans 7). I find this to be a sufficiently compelling distinction between what I do and what the unbeliever does, a wonderful motivation to excellence, and a means of avoiding the casting of odium on the gifts God has distributed to unbelievers.

### **What Does Cornelius Van Til Have to Do with Athens and Jerusalem?**

I understand that some of the criticism of my essay, not only from Mr. Miller but from other quarters as well, arose from those who believe it contradicts fundamental truths elucidated by Cornelius Van Til. A few years ago I read Van Til under Bill Dennison's tutelage and found much of what he says very persuasive. For example, Van Til is surely right when he says, "The first objection that suggests itself may be expressed in the rhetorical question 'Do you mean to assert that non-Christians do not discover truth by the methods they employ?' The reply is that we mean nothing so absurd as that. The implication of the method here advocated is simply that non-Christians are never able and therefore never do employ their own methods consistently."<sup>2</sup> While data do *exist* in the raw (contrary to Mr. Miller's assertion, which I believe overstates the case on that score), and there really is a world out there, Van Til is also correct when he says elsewhere that those who encounter such data are either in rebellion against God or reconciled to him. What implications this insight has for how education functions is to me less clear.

When, for example, we subject the equation  $1+1=2$  to a metaphysical investigation, it has different implications for the believer than for the unbeliever. For the believer this is true because the triune God of the holy Word as unmade maker is the absolute ground for all reality and for our understanding of it. For the unbeliever, it is true for the same reasons despite his ignorance of that fact and his inconsistency in appropriating the data he encounters. Yet this same inconsistency, though personally vicious and culpable, is part of God's common grace, i.e., he uses even the inconsistency of wicked and reprobate men to allow them to know true things about the world. This part of Van Til, to the extent that I understand it, I agree with.

But no one has yet articulated to my satisfaction how these metaphysical considerations alter the way we educate, or change the way that  $1+1=2$  is explained and communicated, beyond adding crucial caveats like "and this would not be so were it not for God's sustaining hand, and to him be the glory for every aspect of any knowledge we have." Since it is the case that those in rebellion against God can function amazingly well, sometimes learning, teaching, and understanding many things better than believers who are not so epistemically impaired, the extent to which the differences in their respective epistemology affect their learning is clearly limited. To put it another way, I do not see how Van Til's understanding of reality changes the way we teach certain topics like classics, mathematics, etc., beyond reminding people that the goal of knowledge's acquisition and dissemination, like that of everything else, is God's glory (the indispensable caveat again). If a student refuses to accept those truths from special

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<sup>2</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), 103. I need to thank Paul Manata for bringing this to my attention. Of course, neither do we as Christians ever employ our own methods consistently. Thank God that the truth of what we believe is not dependent on the consistency of our methods in appropriating and retaining it.

revelation, remarkably they still are able to learn, if they choose, many true things about, for example, Greco-Roman literature. How do we explain that? How do unbelievers even function in this complex world since their epistemology is so flawed? I know Van Til's answer and find it persuasive. Some of the implications of his views, however, like that form and content are never wholly distinguishable, are not persuasive to me. I see so many examples of pagans mastering content using what we might consider bad form that the distinction between them ought not to be abandoned.

The way in which non-Christians discover such data is not different from the way in which we do, and their conclusions are no less sound and valid, and depending on the quality of their reasoning, are sometimes more so. A failure to acknowledge this will lead to all manner of false conclusions and the dangers of perspectivalism, wherein something can be true from one vantage point and false from another. For example, when Mr. Miller searches for a counterexample to my claim, he uses that of constitutional jurisprudence:

There is no doubt that the Bill of Rights is the Bill of Rights whether one studies it at UC Berkeley or Regent University. One could therefore try to make the case that the adjectives "progressive" and "conservative" are meaningless as applied to constitutional jurisprudence. That would be news to the faculty and students at either institution.

The claim is not that the term Christian is meaningless when applied to education, it is rather that it cannot bear the weight many seem to want it to carry. In the same way that the Bill of Rights has an actual meaning as ratified by the Founders, irrespective of how human wickedness seeks to twist and distort it in progressive or conservative directions, so the truth about God's world stands independently of one's perspective. If the progressive jurist or Christian says  $x = y$  at time  $z$  and the conservative jurist or pagan that  $x \neq y$  at time  $z$  they cannot both be right regardless of their epistemic presuppositions. Truth is not a function of one's worldview. I know that neither Mr. Miller nor Van Til seek to make truth a function of worldview. But we must be careful, if we would seek to characterize the way we think and teach as "Christian," that we do not fall into the twin dangers of labeling our own falsehoods as true simply because we are Christian, or of refusing to accept what is true simply because it is thought and taught by non-Christians.<sup>3</sup>

There is one other point here, however, that I would like to address. When I said, "presumably a very bright non-Christian reasoning consistently, diligently and with complete access to the basic data of special revelation, can more often reach sound and valid conclusions than the most devout yet dim-witted believer on the topic of our Lord's incarnation," Mr. Miller replied:

As a plank in his overall argument, I find this simply bizarre: are we really prepared to say that because some non-Christians bring a higher IQ to the Bible than some Christians, and because everyone is using the same Bible, there is no significant difference between a "Christian" and a "non-Christian" understanding of our Lord's

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<sup>3</sup> I could run Mr. Miller's other counterexamples through this same grid, namely that of the terms "evangelical" and "non-evangelical" when applied to New Testament studies, and sexual education. But I trust the reader can do that on his own.

incarnation? I wonder: should the pastor with an average IQ offer his Sunday school class to the brilliant pagan from the local divinity school, because the biblical data of the incarnation is the same no matter who teaches it?

I reply by pointing out, first, that I did not claim any necessity in such matters just possibility, and that I added the important caveats that the unbeliever must be reasoning “consistently, diligently, and with complete access to the basic data of special revelation.” Beyond that, I would ask Mr. Miller whether it is an implication of the Word’s perspicuity that all of its claims and intricacies can be understood full well by the unregenerate and still be rejected. Unbelievers have a different understanding of our Lord’s incarnation because they have not been regenerated and illuminated by the Holy Spirit, nothing more, nothing less. In the third and fourth centuries after Christ, for example, some pagans were inclined to accept intellectually the supernatural claims Christ made about himself and the facts of the resurrection. They sometimes persisted in unbelief nevertheless.

When it comes to the question of who is going to teach Sunday school (which I do not believe, incidentally, is a natural application of my argument but somewhat of a red herring), it is fairly unusual in my experience that someone who is not a believer would have an equal understanding of theological topics as one who is. But this is not because of some gnostic infusion or special aptitude for God’s Word that we have which unbelievers lack. Rather, the explanation is both more simple and humbling, namely that unbelievers seldom have the same interest in the Scriptures as we do. So while theoretically unbelievers can understand God’s Word in a technical way very adequately, and even better sometimes than believers do, it is seldom the case that they actually do.

But to assume that the greatest precision in the expression of theological ideas is always the first priority in teaching is false. I would typically rather have the local pastor teach Sunday school, even though his knowledge of Greek, for example, may not be the same as that of members of the Harvard Divinity School. The reason is that Greek expertise is not always the most important consideration in teaching about such matters. The Lord in his wisdom has entrusted the task of feeding the flock to the church, that as flawed shepherds we might build up the saints. I am not remotely suggesting that we should set aside that responsibility. On the other hand, I have seen many abuses of worldview thinking in which the sloppy efforts and performance of Christians are excused on the basis of their valid profession of faith. So no, the pastor with an average IQ should not offer his class to the brilliant pagan per se, but I can imagine instances in which such would be appropriate, and something very like this happens when pastors consult a variety of exegetical resources to gain clarity on God’s Word without regard for whether such resources were prepared by believers (Josephus is a prominent example).

### **Machen, Chicago, and Wilhelm Herrmann**

I was glad to have Mr. Miller bring to my attention the quote from Machen’s speech to an educational convention in Chicago in 1933. It is well worth reading. But if one examines his whole essay,<sup>4</sup> I believe one will find that it is not really *a propos* of our question. Machen appears to be arguing for the necessity of a society that is free enough to allow schools that offer religious instruction. It seems to me primarily an argument

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<sup>4</sup> Available here: <http://www.reformedliterature.com/machen-the-necessity-of-the-christian-school.php>

against the state meddling in the educational prerogatives of parents and local districts, a brief in part for the maintenance of cherished American institutions in a Tocquevillian fashion without state interference. For example, I take it that when Machen says “I favor it [the Christian school], in the second place, because it is necessary to the propagation of the Christian Faith,” he cannot mean that its mere existence is necessary. Machen knew that the Christian faith was propagated for long ages before anything resembling today’s Christian schools existed. I wish to give Machen the benefit of every doubt in charitable interpretation, but if this is what he means, I must disagree with him.

Beyond that, there seems to be nothing in Machen’s remarks that contradicts my main contention that the difference in the way we as Christians educate primarily has to do with our intentions and motivations, not with method, process, or result as pertains to content. Thus in the part Mr. Miller quoted, Machen speaks of the “bearing,” “meaning,” and “purpose” of the truth, not the process of its impartation or its content. That Machen may have something different in mind than the purpose for which Mr. Miller quoted him is borne out as well, it seems to me, by Machen’s own educational biography. His decision to study at the secular Johns Hopkins University, but especially his desire to be taught by Wilhelm Herrmann and other German liberals is an indication that his assessment of education cannot be easily discussed in worldview terms.

Moreover, Mr. Miller does not mention that part of Machen’s same speech in which he lavishly praises public school teachers, not for their efforts to view all of life from the perspective of Christian faith and to teach in that way, but for their quite ordinary and pagan virtue of diligence. Says Machen, “I desire to pay the warmest possible tribute to many thousands of conscientious men and women who are teachers in the public schools in this country.” Such a commendation is at least arguably out of step with Van Til’s dogged insistence, as quoted by Mr. Miller, on observing the virtual inseparability of form and content.

### **Reductionist Anthropology?**

Perhaps the most incisive of Mr. Miller’s criticisms is that I am operating with a reductionist and therefore unbiblical anthropology. Though I am not sure where in the Scriptures such an anthropology is definitively presented, I see how one could draw the conclusion Mr. Miller does. I was aiming to define and describe what education is *per se*. Indeed, the human mind is not merely a receptacle for knowledge. But it is a receptacle for knowledge. We do quite obviously assimilate facts and retain and analyze them, though fewer of these than we should.

Prudentially speaking, and here opinions differ of course, it seems to me that we live in a time in which the dangers of relativism and the rejection of objective truth are far more pronounced than in previous generations. A consequence of this is that the standards for excellence in academics at all levels are desperately eroded. Does anyone doubt that even our best colleges and seminaries, particularly in languages, philosophy, and historical studies, only approximate the erudition of our forebears? The goals of education, therefore, sometimes must be proximate and not ultimate. I contend that sometimes we ought to be satisfied if students have mastered the basic elements of any given subject matter, and more modest about whether our teaching will result in the character formation that is only accomplished by the grace of God. Augustine’s closing comments in *The Teacher*, in the mouth of his son Adeodatus, are helpful here:

From the encouragement of your arguments I have indeed learned that arguments do nothing but encourage someone toward learning, and that it is equally true that only a little bit of the thinking of the one who speaks emerges in the actual instruction. He alone, moreover, teaches whether what is said is true, He who, when He spoke without, encouraged us that He dwells within. Him shall I love, then, as He himself enables me, with greater zeal the more I shall have advanced in learning.<sup>5</sup>

### **Trivia**

Finally, the Trivium. As a classicist I cannot fail to take Mr. Miller's bait and comment thereupon. Its omission on my part is not "remarkable" but deliberate. Though no doubt it serves some parents and schools well in attaining their educational goals, it is beyond dispute that the Trivium is medieval in origin. In other words, its claim to being classical is specious, and I am not a medievalist. Furthermore, I do not find the exegetical arguments offered for it at all compelling. The book of Proverbs—often cited in this regard—is not intent, so far as I can tell, on explaining how we are to gain the knowledge we need to navigate this broken world in all manner of practical ways. Like other moral teaching in the Scriptures it is an expansion on the law of God to be used in the three ways Calvin elucidates.

But this is no problem, since exegesis of Scripture is no more necessary a prerequisite for selecting a method of instruction than it is for reading *Ordained Servant* on a Kindle as opposed to on paper. I mention again, though I hope it is not necessary to do so, that any method of doing anything that involves means or ends contrary to the law of God is *ipso facto* illegitimate. But the point is that parents and schools ought to have the liberty to adopt whatever methods, provided they are not contrary to God's law, that best accord with the goals they are trying to achieve, since there is no uniquely Christian method of education.

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<sup>5</sup> *De Magistro Liber Unus*, XIV.45; the text is from <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/maestro/index.htm>, the translation is my own. For a complete English translation see Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, translated by Peter King (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995).

# Servant Education

## Geneva College and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church<sup>1</sup>

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by Robert Tarullo

In 1986, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church saw the publication of *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*.<sup>2</sup> Included in that anthology was a brief essay reflecting on the connection between Wheaton College and the OPC. The author, Edward L. Kellogg, draws attention to the early years of the OPC and how many of her ministers educated at Wheaton were encouraged to attend the fledgling seminary of the defrocked J. Gresham Machen, Westminster Theological Seminary. While Mr. Kellogg did not have these numbers available to him at the time, by my count, the total number of ministers as of 2001 who graduated from Wheaton was eighty (spanning the years 1905–1993). Indeed most of these men moved from Wheaton to Westminster and into the ministry of the OPC.

At the denomination's seventy-fifth anniversary, it may be fitting to reflect upon the connection between Geneva College and the OPC. To be sure, Geneva is no Wheaton. Only twenty-eight ministers of the OPC graduated from Geneva (spanning the years 1920–2002). There is a larger story, though, beyond the students who became ministers in our denomination.

Geneva College has a long and rich history that even antedates Wheaton. Founded in 1848 as Geneva Hall by action of the Presbytery of the Lakes of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, Geneva began holding classes in the western Ohio town of Northwood. Beginning as a “Grammar School,” and after a short period of closure due to debt and the Civil War, Geneva reopened largely due to the determination of John L. McCartney, a Reformed Presbyterian pastor in Northwood, along with his conviction for the establishment of a Freedmen's College. The founding of this institution publicly marked Geneva as having strong abolitionist convictions. “As a result, well into the 1880's there were African-Americans from the South in the student body.”<sup>3</sup> Geneva's social concerns remain a steadfast mission of the college. Engraved into the

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<sup>1</sup> I want to acknowledge with thankfulness the assistance that I received from Linda Foh, OPC Web Assistant, Becky Phillips, Interim Director of Alumni, Church and Parent Relations, Kae Kirkwood, Geneva College archivist, and John Muether, Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, without whom this little project could not have been completed.

<sup>2</sup> Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble, eds., *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> David M. Carson, *Pro Christo et Patria: A History of Geneva College* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning, 1997), 11–12.

very heart of the college is *Pro Christo et Patria*. The motto of the college is “For Christ and Country.” The goal of the college is to “transform society for the kingdom of Christ.”

After moving to Beaver Falls in 1879, the campus stands with the prominent building, affectionately dubbed, “Old Main” (completed in 1881) at its center. Over time Geneva grew from being a small Christian “Grammar School” into an academic institution offering the Bachelor of Arts and Science, as well as being known for its athletics.

In the 1930s, Geneva received a gift to construct a new library building. The gift was in honor of the Rev. Dr. Clarence E. Macartney. Macartney was the prominent Presbyterian preacher serving the First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh. Having been reared within the Reformed Presbyterian Church and having grown up on the campus of Geneva College in the home his father, John L. McCartney, built and named Ferncliffe, Macartney knew Geneva well. He spoke there on more than one occasion. McCartney Library stands in honor of a man who had become colleague and ally of J. Gresham Machen. Together with Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism*, Macartney’s address in 1922, “Shall Unbelief Win?” (a response to Harry Emerson Fosdick’s infamous “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”), was a clearly articulated response to modernism, and it raised the banner of Christ in the fight against modernism in the mainline Presbyterian Church. While Macartney supported Machen’s new training grounds for the ministry in Westminster Theological Seminary, he would eventually balk at the idea of the necessity of forming a new denomination. While Machen died on January 1, 1937, serving the new denomination, Macartney remained at First Presbyterian Church until his death in 1957 in Ferncliffe, Geneva College. In his autobiography, Macartney would reflect upon his former ally’s founding of a new Presbyterian denomination, “The movement was abortive. Only a handful of men, sincere and courageous, however, followed Dr. Machen in the secession.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite Macartney’s determination to stay in the PCUSA, Geneva College has served the OPC well. Now in its 162<sup>nd</sup> year as a Reformed and Presbyterian institution of higher learning, Geneva has more recently become a planting ground for the OPC. This new planting ground for the OPC coincides with Geneva’s clearer articulation of its Reformed identity. According to Geneva historian David M. Carson, it was not until the 1960s that Geneva began to once again become self-conscious about its “historic roots as a Christian college [which] climaxed in the adoption in 1967 of the *Foundational Concepts of Christian Education*.”<sup>5</sup>

It is at this point in Geneva’s history that young men who would become OPC ministers began attending the college. Until 1960, there were only three Geneva graduates who became ministers in the OPC. During the decade of the sixties, no less than seven graduates would become OPC ministers. As well, professor of church history at Westminster Seminary and the first OPC historian, the Rev. Dr. Paul Woolley received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1969. (In the next decade, Westminster’s Harvie Conn would be accorded a similar honor.)

The influence of Geneva College upon the OPC is largely found in its faculty and the local church. As the present author received comments from fellow alumni, a few common themes arose. Geneva provided a foundation in liberal arts that prepared young

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<sup>4</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, *The Making of a Minister: The Autobiography of Clarence E. Macartney*, ed., J. Clyde Henry (Great Neck, NY: Channel, 1961), 189.

<sup>5</sup> Carson, *Pro Christo et Patria*, xi.

men for seminary; we were either introduced to or reinforced in the Reformed faith and life, as well as to the OPC through its professors and proximity to the local congregation of Grace OPC in Sewickley, Pennsylvania. Beyond this, Geneva, along with Westminster Seminary, also became the institutional support behind the OPC's controversial inner city educational ministry, The Center for Urban Theological Studies (CUTS), based in Philadelphia.

Formally organized in 1978, CUTS could trace its roots to Emmanuel Chapel, an inner city Philadelphia home mission work of the OPC, where OPC minister Bill Krispin served as evangelist from 1968–1975. Geneva's historic concern for racial relationships among the people of God may explain its academic support for CUTS. The opening paragraph of the center's constitution expresses a theology of racial reconciliation as a basis for doing ministry:

Early in our nation's history the church was divided into alienated unites when white Christians failed to receive their black brothers and sisters into the fullness of fellowship and ministry in the church. . . . The unity of the body of Christ necessitates that urban and non-urban churches today actively seek ways together of meeting each other's needs.<sup>6</sup>

To this end, the Geneva College Program offered one major leading to a BA degree in biblical studies with an urban ministry emphasis. Through the OPC's Committee on Home Mission and Church Extension, the center would "enable the OPC to begin new [urban] churches in the company of committed friends rather than in isolation."<sup>7</sup>

As I reflect upon my years at Geneva, I am in awe of God's sovereign handiwork. Like others before me, I was well prepared for seminary through Geneva's rigorous Christian liberal arts program. For those who attended Geneva in the sixties and seventies, the influence came through Johannes G. Vos, Robert B. Tweed, and John H. White. According to alumnus Mark R. Brown, pastor of Westminster OPC, Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, Johannes Geerhardus (more familiarly, J. G.) Vos, the son of Princeton Seminary's renowned professor of biblical theology, Geerhardus Vos, was a particularly important influence. Brown remembered the younger Vos "as a kind and gentle man with Reformed piety mixed with humor rather than stuffiness." Vos and Tweed strongly encouraged Geneva graduates to enroll at Westminster Theological Seminary.

Of J. G. Vos's influence, former student, colleague, and president of Geneva, John H. White wrote:

The Reformed community owes Dr. [J. G.] Vos a deep debt of gratitude because several of his father's works were substantially edited and rewritten by him. *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus* was edited and rewritten sentence by sentence by Dr. Vos in order to make it more readable and useful. *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews*

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<sup>6</sup> Iain Crichton, "Empowering for Effective Urban Ministry: The Center for Urban Theological Studies—Philadelphia," *Urban Mission* 5 (November 1987): 36.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 35. For further discussion of CUTS and the OPC, see D.G. Hart, *Between the Times: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Transition, 1956–1990* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2011), 206–10.

was assembled from old syllabi, students' notes, and his own class notes. *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* was assembled in a completely rewritten form from mimeographed editions and lecture notes by Dr. Vos, and a detailed index was added by him. Humanly speaking, the revival of interest in 'Vosian Biblical Theology' would not have occurred without J. G. Vos.<sup>8</sup>

While neither father nor son would become members of the OPC, the younger Vos continued the influence his father exerted on the denomination. Students of Vos, both father and son, became entrenched in biblical theology. In many ways Geneva proved to be the introduction for some to the biblical theology of Geerhardus Vos. This would later become reinforced at Westminster Theological Seminary where many of them were ushered off for pastoral training.

If Charles G. Dennison was correct when he wrote of Geerhardus Vos's influence upon the OPC,<sup>9</sup> then certainly his son, would have relayed similar influence as well. By all accounts, each displayed a keen exegetical eye through the lens of Reformed biblical theology. Thankfully, their ability to convey that exegesis with the humility of Christ would be an influence of great import to the OPC.

There were other factors as well. For this author, the influence came from Dr. Byron G. Curtis. His Bible and Hebrew classes flamed a love for the Old Testament. His love for God and the language of the Scriptures was infectious.

But for me and many others, it was the local church that was most influential. Grace OPC in Sewickley, Pennsylvania, began under the ministry of the Rev. Donald M. Poundstone in 1970 just in time for the several new students eager to learn about the OPC. His ministry encouraged young men such as Robert Eckardt (class of '74), Robert Harting (class of '74), and Robert Tanzie (class of '74) to pursue the ministry in the OPC.

The ministry of Grace OPC was bewildering to me at first, reflecting this newcomer's shallowness and ignorance of the Reformed faith. On the invitation of a classmate, Chad Bond (now an OPC minister), this newly converted mainline Episcopalian took a forty-minute drive to the Pittsburgh suburb of Sewickley. There Charles G. Dennison preached powerful sermons that were not for the faint of heart. After a few weeks I departed, determined never to return. A year later, I returned at the persistent requests of my friend. Several months and many inquirer's classes with Pastor Dennison later, I professed my faith for the first time in a Reformed and Presbyterian Church in May of 1995.

It was the combined influence of the faithful ministry of Grace OPC with Pastor Dennison, the wise session, and loving congregation along with the excellent required and elective Bible and language classes at Geneva that influenced me to enter the ministry of the OPC.

Without these influences how would I have ever managed to climb into the bell tower of Old Main determined to read through Vos's *The Wonderful Tree* with Sarah Bingham, now my wife. Nor would I breathlessly try to explain Vos's two-ages diagram on a

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<sup>8</sup> John H. White, ed., *The Book of Books: Essays on the Scriptures in Honor of Johannes G. Vos*, (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978), ix–x. My thanks to Byron Curtis for alerting me to this resource.

<sup>9</sup> "Geerhardus Vos and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," in *History for a Pilgrim People: the Historical Writings of Charles G. Dennison*, eds. Danny E. Olinger & David K. Thompson (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2002), 67–87.

napkin parked behind McKee Hall after a “Calvin Forum” book club, a ministry of Grace OPC.

In so many ways, Geneva College and the local church of Grace OPC, Sewickley shaped who I am now, serving as a pastor in Newtown, Connecticut. Charlie Dennison once wrote, “History is what God does to you.”<sup>10</sup> Truly, I am not alone in attesting the fact that Geneva College has influenced the OPC in some of her student body becoming ministers. God has worked through so many secondary causes to bring about mature men serving in our midst as moderators, general secretaries, regional home missionaries, foreign and home missionaries, and pastors of the local church whose desire it is “not only to preach Christ, but also to live Christ, even as they preach.”<sup>11</sup>

The success that Geneva has had in producing ministerial members for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church owes by and large to a unique synergy between the instruction in the classroom and the preached Word from the pulpit. As this essay has suggested, some of the principals in that arrangement—J. G. Vos and Charles Dennison—are now passed from the scene. Time will tell whether the college will continue to bear fruit for the OPC.

As Kellogg suggested, Wheaton was arguably the greatest feeder to the OPC ministerial ranks in the denomination’s earliest years. After World War II, Calvin College may have assumed that role. Of course, many other Christian colleges have served the OPC well (among them Gordon, Dordt, and especially in recent years, Covenant). But pride of place for the past quarter century may go to Geneva College. Its ties to the OPC, though often indirect and subtle, have been a noteworthy feature of the story of the OPC.

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<sup>10</sup> “Vos and the OPC,” 67.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

# The Education of a Monster

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by James S. Gidley

You might wonder how an engineer came to be so interested in a piece of English literature from the British Romantic period.<sup>1</sup> I was reading about technology and society, and I repeatedly encountered authors who used *Frankenstein* as a metaphor for technology in general. A strong current of thought about technology both among intellectuals and in the general public is to view it as a monster out of control, dehumanizing us and destroying the fabric of our society. I thought that I had better get to the bottom of the matter and find out what *Frankenstein* was all about.

In the process of doing that, I became hooked on the story itself. It is simultaneously a popular novel and a great novel of ideas. I have approached the novel with a good deal of skepticism about whether it was really about technology. My mature conclusion is that it does say something about technology, but that you have to pay attention to much deeper issues in the story before you can decipher what cautionary tale Mary Shelley might actually be telling. I have taken a journey whose point of departure was technology, and I have come back to technology with a much deeper appreciation of what ails us in the early twenty-first century. Yes, although *Frankenstein* was written almost two hundred years ago, it is startlingly contemporary.

Before digging into the significance of the novel, we must pause to examine what the story actually says. In short, we need to take some time to examine the *real* story. If you are familiar only with film versions of the story, you will need to do some rethinking, for all the movies that I have seen get some major things wrong—even my favorite, the Mel Brooks version, *Young Frankenstein*. It will be convenient to think about the true story by examining three myths about the novel.

## **Myth No. 1: The Creature Was Made by Stitching Together Parts of Dead Bodies**

This myth was started by an inattentive early reviewer, and it has stuck ever since. It has been deeply embedded in popular consciousness by the classic, 1931 movie version of *Frankenstein* starring Boris Karloff. But there are many evidences in the text of the novel that Mary Shelley did not think of her “hideous progeny” in this way. Of course, she had to be quite vague about the technology involved, but the evidence is strong nonetheless. I only have time to make two points: (1) Victor Frankenstein explicitly disavows the ability to raise the dead. If he could not raise the dead, how could he raise parts of dead bodies? (2) He says that he purposely made the body quite large—about eight feet tall—to make the work on the fine structures of the creature’s anatomy easier. Where would he find assorted human body parts to make up a body eight feet tall?

You may be wondering why this is important. It is important because there is no possibility of resurrection or redemption in *Frankenstein*. It is a story of creation, fall, and damnation. As a story of creation, it has much more in common with recent science fiction stories about robots than might appear on the surface.

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<sup>1</sup> The paper was originally a presentation at a Geneva College Faculty Luncheon on April 7, 2005.

## **Myth No. 2: Victor Frankenstein Was Overjoyed with His Scientific and Technological Triumph in Bringing a Sentient Being to Life**

This myth is embedded in our consciousness again by the Boris Karloff movie version, in which a triumphant Frankenstein, in the presence of a roomful of witnesses, cries out exultingly: “It’s alive!” From this scene we get one of our stereotypical images of the mad scientist, exulting over a hideous triumph while the witnesses and the audience are chilled to the bone. But in the real story, Victor Frankenstein creates the monster entirely alone; he never has an assistant, and there is no witness to the moment of creation except himself. In the real story, Victor Frankenstein is *himself* horrified by his creature, and immediately abandons it. When it pursues him into his room, he dashes terrified into the streets, and the creature wanders off into the forest.

This abandonment of the creature is of central significance to the whole story. It was the central vision of the story from the first moment that Mary Shelley conceived of it, according to her account in the preface to the 1831 edition:

I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the workings of some powerful engine, show signs of life . . . His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken.<sup>2</sup>

There are various important consequences of this vision of the horrified creator. One of the most important, in my view, is that Mary Shelley’s story of creation matches deism perfectly: the creator finishes his masterwork and then abandons it to its own devices.

## **Myth No. 3: The Myth of the Inarticulate, Stumbling Hulk**

Again the 1931 film version has trumped the novel itself in popular consciousness. The creature played by Boris Karloff never says a word—until the 1935 sequel, *Bride of Frankenstein*, and even then, he speaks largely in monosyllables and short declarative sentences of broken English. The creature of the novel, however, is, if anything, more articulate than his creator! How he gets to be so is one of the tales I have to tell. For *Frankenstein*, among other things, is a novel about education. Which leads us to my title theme: “The Education of a Monster.”

### **The Education of a Monster**

In fact, there are three tales of education in *Frankenstein*. Victor Frankenstein narrates the story of his childhood and young manhood, and in so doing, he tells us about his own education and that of Henry Clerval, his boyhood best friend. The creature himself narrates the story of his own education to a stupefied Frankenstein, who has not seen his own creature for almost two years since that fateful night in which he ran from him in terror.

The tales of education are not merely circumstantial detail in *Frankenstein*. Both of Mary Shelley’s illustrious parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, had written about education, and Mary was quite familiar with their writings. *Frankenstein* is a fictional laboratory of education.

I’ll begin with the education of Henry Clerval, Victor Frankenstein’s boyhood friend. Henry is fascinated as a child with romantic literature: knights in shining armor and so forth. His education was humanistic. When he finally joins Victor at the University of

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 9.

Ingolstadt, just after Victor has created the monster, Victor suffers a mental and physical breakdown, and Henry nurses him back to health. Victor's recovery is completed by joining Henry in the study of oriental languages and literature. The message is that humanistic study is life-giving.

But that is not the whole story! In the end, Henry is murdered by the monster without ever knowing what it is—Victor never tells him his dark secret. That is to say, Henry's humanistic education leaves him defenseless against the destructive forces let loose in society by Frankenstein's scientific education.

As a child, Victor had joined Henry in his literary education, but he had not been so enamored of it as Henry was. A crucial event early in the novel is when Victor discovers a book written by Cornelius Agrippa, a renaissance alchemist and magician. The writings of Agrippa have become occult classics. Victor goes on to other occult writers, and he attempts to perform the magical science that he reads of. Yet he is unsuccessful, becomes disgusted with his favorite authors, and turns his back on science until he goes to the University of Ingolstadt.

There, he encounters science professors who debunk the so-called science of Cornelius Agrippa, adding a theoretical refutation of Victor's favorite authors to the disillusionment that he has already experienced. Victor then goes on to excel in the best of the modern science of his day, principally chemistry and physiology. Mary Shelley goes out of her way to emphasize that Victor's success at creating a living, rational being is not the result of magic or supernatural effects; he uses no incantations and calls on no divine, angelic, or demonic powers. His is a triumph of the best science of Shelley's day.

Critics have argued over whether Shelley sees superstitious, medieval alchemy or objective, modern science as the culprit that lets loose the monster. In my view, this is a false dichotomy: it is not either/or, it is both/and. In bringing Frankenstein into the world of natural science by way of medieval alchemy and superstition, Shelley is connecting the sorcerer with the scientist. In large measure we owe to Shelley the figure of the mad scientist. The mad scientist is the lineal descendant of the sorcerer.

By extension, Shelley is connecting the whole body of modern science with sorcery. This is the deep paradigm underlying the use of the Frankenstein metaphor by anti-technology writers. Anti-technology writers do not fear the failures of technology but its successes. In an earlier age, Europeans feared supernatural powers—the demonic forces at the disposal of the sorcerer. Since our culture, generally, no longer fears the supernatural, a new fear is substituted: fear of the powers of science.

The effect of Mary Shelley's portrayal of Frankenstein is to create an atmosphere of what I call the natural supernatural: the production of stupendous feats, ordinarily associated with supernatural powers, by purely natural means. This is deeply connected to the Enlightenment worldview, in which the supernatural is discredited. Where then can a vision of horror arise? Only from within the natural world itself. Therefore, our de-supernaturalized world itself becomes both the source and the arena of supernatural effects, mirroring the Enlightenment's collapsing of the supernatural into the natural realm.

Frankenstein is not the hapless bumbler that some of the critics would make him out to be. He is all too powerful and successful. His creation threatens humanity just as it threatens humanism. If a man can create a living, sentient, rational creature, then the humanities are in principle subsumed into the natural sciences.

Now we must hasten on to consider the education of the creature himself. After Frankenstein abandons him, the creature wanders into the forest, where he begins to learn

by direct sensory experience. He learns about light, darkness, cold, heat, hunger, pain, and so forth. He learns to use fire; he does not become irrationally afraid of it. He passes this whole first period of his existence with little or no contact with human beings, but his early encounters with humans prove to be disastrous. He is uniformly feared and hated for his hideous appearance.

Having been violently rejected by humans, the creature seeks a hiding place. He finds refuge in a hovel adjoining a rustic cottage. There he is able to conceal himself, and he finds that he can observe the cottagers through a small crack in the wall. He begins to learn language by observation. His language acquisition is greatly accelerated by the arrival at the cottage of an Arabian woman, Safie, whom the cottagers proceed to teach French. The eavesdropping monster learns more quickly than the Arabian.

Which leads us to the creature's book-learning. His higher education consists in the knowledge of just five books, carefully selected by Mary Shelley. First, he overhears the cottagers reading a book to Safie to help her to learn French. It is *The Ruins of Empires* by Constantin Volney. Published in 1793, *The Ruins* is essentially a defense of the French Revolution and a trenchant attack on all forms of monarchy and organized religion, which Volney views as intimate allies.

A key passage in *The Ruins* reads like the story of the creature itself, in summary form, from Chapter 6 "The Primitive State of Man":

Formed naked in body and in mind, man at first found himself thrown as it were by chance, on a rough and savage land: an orphan, abandoned by the unknown power which had produced him.<sup>3</sup>

Volney's theology is simply deism: he is describing the god who creates and then abandons his creation, exactly as Victor Frankenstein does. The monster gains from Volney a grounding in the Enlightenment worldview.

At this point in the story, the creature finds a satchel in the forest, containing three books: *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, by Goethe, Plutarch's *Lives*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Each of these books advances the creature's understanding.

*The Sorrows of Young Werther*, published in 1774, is generally regarded as the beginning of the Romantic movement in European literature. The plot is a simple story of unrequited love leading to the suicide of the title character. But it is told with such skill and emotional power that it had to be banned in several countries to stem the growing tide of suicides among young men who identified with the title character. *Werther* teaches the creature of the power of emotions. Even more importantly, reading *Werther* stimulates the creature to ask such questions as "Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?"<sup>4</sup> Significantly, neither Henry Clerval nor Victor Frankenstein had ever asked such questions. They knew—or thought they knew—only too well who and what they were.

Plutarch's *Lives*, published in the second century AD, is a manual of ancient pagan virtue. Plutarch arranges his biographical sketches in pairs, each containing one Greek

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<sup>3</sup> Constantin F. Volney, *The Ruins, or, Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires: and The Law of Nature* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991), 22.

<sup>4</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 131.

statesman and one Roman, followed by a comparison of the two. Plutarch teaches the creature what virtue is—pagan virtue, that is, not Christian.

Next, the monster learns from Milton's *Paradise Lost* what it would mean to have a personal relationship with his creator. The story teaches him how his creator has wronged him. His unknown creator has provided him with no revelation regarding his origin, purpose, or destiny. Even more importantly, the creature realizes that he is one of a kind. As such, he is denied all communion with human beings or any other rational creatures. In his own words, "Increase of knowledge only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was."<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the creature reads Victor Frankenstein's laboratory notebook, which he had discovered in a pocket of the coat that he had taken with him when he wandered out of Frankenstein's laboratory. In the notebook, he learns both his creator's name and native city and the story of his own origin. This at last gives the answer to his questions. He finds that he is not the exalted companion of God and angels that Adam was, but merely an assemblage of matter. This is the intellectual center of the novel. The creature is purely physical; any intelligence or emotion that he exhibits is purely the result of physical causes.

This conception was in fact the genesis of the whole story. Mary Shelley describes the way that her theme developed in her mind in this way:

Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and [Percy] Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener. During one of these, various philosophical doctrines were discussed, and among others the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any probability of its ever being discovered and communicated.<sup>6</sup>

If so, then it is natural to expect that in due time, we would learn the secret of our own physical makeup and be able to manufacture ourselves. Here we have the whole point of the story. And the whole horror of it as well.

What *is* the point of all this?

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* continues to resonate in the contemporary world because its horror is rooted in the presuppositions that are widely held in the modern West. In so far as our educational systems are rooted in those same presuppositions, then they must be productive of the same sort of horror. What is the anatomy of that educational horror?

### **The Destruction of the Humanities**

As I have noted before, if human beings are merely assemblages of matter, then the humanities are subsumed under the natural sciences. The humanities have no distinct subject matter, for everything human is ultimately explainable by the interactions of chance and necessity with matter-energy. For example, the whole literary output of a Shakespeare is merely the product of his physiology and environment, which are in turn the result of biochemical reactions, which are in turn the result of the physical interactions of elementary particles. Everything, ultimately, is physics.

Within this worldview, the humanities are defenseless. They must perish, as Henry Clerval did, at the hands of the monster. The reality underlying the symbolism is that the knowledge-product of all-subsuming natural science destroys humanistic knowledge. There

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 8.

are certainly evidences of this in the academy: humanities instruction is under siege and—to change the metaphor—seemingly rudderless. Meanwhile, the natural sciences cruise along, robust and potent.

### **The Deification/Demonization of Natural Science**

Frankenstein achieves god-like powers with his science. Prior to the Romantic period, no author would have referred to herself as “creative.”<sup>7</sup> Mary Shelley was part of the movement that desacralized the word “create.” An anonymous reviewer of the first edition of the novel highlights the historical transition in these words:

We are accustomed, happily, to look upon the creation of a living and intelligent being as a work that is fitted only to inspire a religious emotion . . . the expression “Creator,” applied to a mere human being, gives us the same sort of shock with the phrase, “the Man Almighty,” and others of the same kind in Mr. Southey’s “Curse of Kehama.”<sup>8</sup>

As I have said already, the horror of Frankenstein is not failed science but successful science. What if it is really true? What if science is really capable of manufacturing a person? You get the theme of all the robot stories of science fiction, including *The Terminator*, *The Matrix*, and *I, Robot*. Wedded to evolutionary thinking, the horror of the robot is that it will be the superior species that has better survivability than *homo sapiens*. The robots will win, and humanity will become extinct. Thus science assumes god-like powers of destruction as well as creation.

The technology is at our doorstep, or so the scientists and technologists think. Let me cite two examples. Rodney Brooks, head of a robotics laboratory at MIT, writes

The body, this mass of biomolecules, is a machine that acts according to a set of specifiable rules . . . The body consists of components that interact according to well-defined (though not all known to us humans) rules that ultimately derive from physics and chemistry. The body is a machine . . . Every person I meet is . . . a machine—a big bag of skin full of biomolecules interacting according to describable and knowable rules.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, he argues, his robots must eventually be accorded equal rights with humans.

In Japan, robot-making has become big business. In the 2005 issue of *ASEE Prism*, the journal of the American Society for Engineering Education, there is a news article about the latest robots on the Japanese market. We read of “Robots Who Can Schmooze”:

The antidote to becoming the world’s fastest graying society? In Japan, the solution is obvious. Recruit intelligent machines to help care for, entertain, and comfort the elderly . . . One of the latest incarnations is a chatty 18-inch model, named ifbot, that has attracted strong advance orders despite a hefty price tag of nearly \$6,000. Programmed to comprehend and assemble millions of phrases, this bot is geared to serve as a

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<sup>7</sup> This observation was made by Dr. Ann Paton, professor emerita of English at Geneva College, at an event shortly before the occasion on which this paper was originally given.

<sup>8</sup> Anon., Review in the *Edinburgh Magazine*, March 1818, reprinted in Hunter, J. Paul, ed., *Mary Shelley, Frankenstein*, A Norton Critical Edition (London: W. W. Norton, 1996), 195.

<sup>9</sup> Rodney Brooks, *Flesh and Machines: How Robots Will Change Us* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 173–174.

companion and senility-prevention device for the elderly. A menu of 15 programs enables it to discuss the news, quiz its owner, and even prompt a round of karaoke.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Fight to the Death between the Sciences and the Humanities**

The well-known antagonism between the sciences and the humanities in the academy is not a petty turf war. It is a Darwinian struggle for survival. Shelley is telling us that the sciences must win, but that it will be a Pyrrhic victory—science will win us only despair and death, as Victor Frankenstein did in the end.

### **The Inescapable Religious Foundation of Education**

Only the monster encountered the question “Who am I?” in his education. The answer is both the meaning of his education and the key to the novel. Today, as in Mary Shelley’s day, great hopes were placed upon education as a cure for all human ills. Only educate people correctly, they were told, and we are told, and the evils of society will be greatly ameliorated, if not eradicated.

*Frankenstein* is a horror tale for the educators. What if it’s all wrong? What if education merely confirms the student in hopelessness and meaninglessness? What if the answer to the question “Who am I?” is “You are not a who, but a what; not an I, but an it”? The right question is “What is it?” and the right answer is, “It is an assemblage of matter-energy governed by chance and natural law.”

What is the way out? I can only be suggestive. I find it helpful to think in terms of the relationship between word and matter. In the modern scientific paradigm, matter precedes word. That is, matter-energy has existed for billions of years, human speech only for the last few tens or hundreds of thousands of years. In other words, the universe is fundamentally material and impersonal. Words and persons ultimately derive their existence and their meaning from matter. It is my conviction that this leaves words and persons without real meaning.

On the other hand, the Bible presents us with an account of creation in which words precede matter-energy. God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. The verbal conception of light exists prior to the incarnation of light as matter-energy. And behind the words of creation stands him who *is* the Word. Now we have a created universe that is imbued with word through and through. Words imply speakers and hearers—in short, persons. The words proceed from three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The universe is personal. In such a universe, both words and matter have meaning. I trust that that is the universe in which we actually live.

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<sup>10</sup> Lucy Craft, “Technology: Robots Who Can Schmooze,” *ASEE Prism* 14, no. 7 (March 2005): 15.

# ServantReading

## Life's Complications and the Limits of Expertise A Review Article

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by D. G. Hart

*The Anointed: Evangelical Truth in a Secular Age*, by Randall J. Stephens and Karl W. Giberson. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2011, 356 pages, \$29.95.

Life in modern society is tough. In any given week, an average American may have to decide which is the best and prettiest paint for the exterior of his house, what are the best and most affordable tires to put on his car, whether to replace a deep filling with another filling or with a crown, whether to diversify the investments in his retirement portfolio, and which candidate from the Republican Party is the best to run against a Democratic incumbent in the upcoming presidential election. No single American has sufficient knowledge to make all of these decisions simply on the basis of his own learning and reading. In addition to confronting these dilemmas, this person likely has a full-time job that occupies much of his time, and a wife and children that take up most of his spare time—not to mention incredibly difficult choices about bad influences on his son at school, whether his daughter should play field hockey, and consulting with his wife about his mother-in-law's declining health and the best arrangements for her well being. If he is a Christian with responsibilities at church, he may need to wade through files of applications for a pulpit search committee, or consult with architects and engineers about plans to expand the church's parking lot.

Complicating further this average American's decisions are the accompanying choices to be made over which advice to follow. For in addition to life's complicated questions are a bevy of advisors, available on the radio and television, folks such as Oprah, Rush Limbaugh, and Dave Ramsey—people who seem to have a lot of insight into life's difficulties. But which of these advisors to heed raises an additional layer of decisions. Life is tough.

The authors of *The Anointed*, Randall J. Stephens and Karl W. Giberson, both of whom are evangelical academics associated with Eastern Nazarene College (the former a historian, the latter a physicist), do not consider this average American believer's plight but do address a problem associated with it. It is the authority of experts and how Americans—in this case, evangelical Protestants—come to regard certain figures as reputable teachers and spokesmen on questions surrounding the history and character of the United States, the proximity of Christ's return, the creation of the universe, and even the formation of a Christian outlook on the world. Of course, these matters represent an entirely broader range of decisions than the myriad of choices facing the American Christian mentioned above. But choosing whether or not to employ the counsel of a television preacher or a radio talk show host is a similar process even if the consequences

of the decision, both for the person deciding and the celebrity being followed, are of a different order. Had Stephens and Giberson considered life's complexity and the need for expert instruction they may not have presented evangelical Protestants in as unflattering a light as they do.

*The Anointed* defies ready classification. The publisher, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, does not include a topic on the dust jacket, thus leaving book shop clerks yet one more decision to make in a life of decisions. The Library of Congress subject classification included in the preliminary pages lists evangelicalism as the first, and "Intellect—Religious Aspects" as the second subject. These will help librarians when considering where to shelve this book. As helpful as these are, the Library of Congress's catalogers go on to include another six subjects, among them "Conservatism—Christian Aspects," and "Christianity and Culture—United States." The lists suggest the cataloguers were as uncertain of the book's genre as readers will be. One subject they refused—though it may be the most fitting one—is *exposé*. For the book reads like one by insiders who decide to blow the whistle to outsiders about the dirty secrets of their group. Stephens and Giberson are not overly vicious in their description of the evangelical subculture, though an Ivy League university press is not the place to look for a muckraking account of minorities in the United States. At the same time, the authors do not make a concerted effort to explain away the oddities of evangelical beliefs and how far these Protestants depart from the boundaries of accepted knowledge.

The book includes four chapters on significant features of popular evangelical thought, with two additional sections on the tendency of evangelical Protestants to separate from the world and the mechanisms by which certain born-again preachers or leaders become "anointed" figures within these subcultures. The first four chapters cover the unique (and odd) beliefs that evangelicals have about the age of the earth (in contrast to the findings of natural scientists), the Christian origins of the United States (in contrast to the conclusions of academic historians), the nature of the Christian family (as opposed to advice from professional social scientists), and the taste that evangelicals have for apocalyptic and prophetic portions of the Bible (as opposed to the interpretations of professional biblical scholars). Along the way, the authors devote lengthy sections to the careers of Ken Ham, the creator of Answers in Genesis, David Barton, a popular amateur historian who argues for the Christian roots of the United States, James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family, and Hal Lindsey, author of the enormously popular *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Stephens and Giberson look beyond these four figures and show how evangelicals have an appetite for uniquely Christian ideas about creation, the United States, the family, and the return of Christ. In fact, the traction that these notions gain among evangelicals is responsible for a religious subculture, the authors argue, that is generally impervious to scholarship, expertise, and professional opinions in the wider society. This subculture is also the soil from which televangelists, such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Oral Roberts, gain followers and attract donations sufficient to found universities. Stephens and Giberson write:

The fundamentalist end of the evangelical spectrum contains a culture that does indeed seem unable to distinguish between meaningful scholarship and what Wolfe has called "gibberish." Ken Ham places a dinosaur looking over Eve's shoulder in the Garden of Eden exhibit at his museum. Tourists pay to look at it and leave the

Creation Museum, believing that what they just saw is both scientific and biblical. Tim LaHaye inserts the emergence of a common European currency into the book of Revelation; David Barton converts Ben Franklin into a Bible-believing Christian; James Dobson claims that the institution of marriage has not changed in five thousand years. Absent a more vigorous intellectual mind, such ideas take root and flourish. And their spokespersons can function as authority figures. (243)

Conservative Reformed Protestants may find several points on which to agree with Stephens and Giberson even while questioning the authors' implicit recommendations for those who believe the Bible. Orthodox Presbyterians, for instance, may find regrettable the faulty logic, poor reasoning, and erroneous biblical interpretation that allow evangelical Protestants to read Genesis, the American founding, marriage and the family, and Revelation the way they do. But are evangelical Protestants any stranger than other religious subcultures in the United States? These Protestants are about the same size as their African-Americans counterparts, and yet one could not well imagine these white authors finding approval from editors of Harvard University Press to publish a book that exposed similar idiosyncrasies among African-American Protestant pastors and leaders. One reason that Stephens and Giberson may feel comfortable singling out evangelicals is the political repercussions of the born-again subculture. Indeed, many of the ideas treated in *The Anointed* influence the way the evangelical Protestants vote. But is this any less true for African-Americans? Were not Jeremiah Wright's widely circulated ideas about the differences between European and African mentalities not a factor in gaining some support for the current president of the United States, who was, by the way, a regular listener to Wright's sermons?

The way the authors single-out evangelicals as a bizarre subculture is arguably the greatest weakness of the book. But so is the authors' failure to acknowledge the real difficulties that bedevil the harmonization of Scripture and the findings of science. Equally lamentable is Stephens and Giberson's failure to explore the real limitations of scientific or scholarly experts. They present their case as if evangelicals are foolish for not accepting what learned experts teach and report. To be sure, if evangelicals believe that the Bible teaches truth in such a way as to make science unnecessary, then Stephens and Giberson have a point. Even so, as evangelicals themselves, the authors might have made some effort to explain why the Bible is authoritative at least on some of the contested claims of scientists. And as experts themselves, Stephens and Giberson might have conceded the weakness of scientific expertise. After all, at the very same time that they were writing this book, economic experts were giving advice to politicians, investment brokers, and bankers that turned out to do far more damage to the United States than any Garden of Eden Museum possibly could.

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# ServantPoetry

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G. E. Reynolds (1949–)

## The Facebook Box

San serif on the dull blue ribbon  
Like a death sentence on the self  
This header spells your doom  
Like a forgotten book on a shelf.

No thumbs down to record  
My displeasure—no, I don't like this.  
No room to measure these  
Pampered selves more or less.

I have chosen to avoid the trap  
In your little adolescent box  
For I would rather be  
A sly old media fox.